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ABSTRACT

Nonformal educational programs, which are frequently characterized by their transmission of knowledge outside the limitations and role expectations of the traditional classroom, exist today as they have throughout the past. Among the common characteristics of the diverse nonformal educational programs throughout the world is their responsiveness to the immediate needs of a specific population or situation. One of the most successful literacy programs to date is the nonformal program developed in Brazil by Paulo Freire. Freire's program begins with the development of a core vocabulary based on a study of the life issues faced by the illiterate population to be taught, followed by the development and use of word cards and of pictures to stimulate discussion. In New Zealand, Sylvia Ashton-Warner rejected standard basal readers for her Maori students and developed a nonformal approach in which she solicited vocabulary words from each child and used the words as the basis for beginning reading, creative writing, spelling instruction, and reading and writing practice. Ashton-Warner also created reading books for Maori children. Among the aspects of Freire and Ashton-Warner's work that are indicative of many nonformal educational programs are a rejection of traditional materials, redefinition of the teacher role, flexibility, and response to students' emotional needs. The documented successes of nonformal approaches to reading instruction suggest the desirability of incorporating such nonformal approaches as the language experience approach in beginning reading programs. (GT)

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A Brief Background of Non-formal Education and Two Applications in Reading

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Introduction

Classical literature can provide the educational historian with information about the origin of schools as the formal means of imparting knowledge to the young. The roots of non-formal education cannot so easily be found, but one can imagine the process of synthesizing and passing along information occurring long before history was recorded. Transmitting skills or information outside the confines of an organized superstructure -- the schools -- is one aspect of non-formal education.

The educational systems of classical Greece and Rome included examples of non-formal education (Cary, Nock, et al, 1949). Slaves or private tutors instructed the young, and academies such as Plato's taught philosophy through the non-formal seminar approach. Education above the secondary level was provided by Sophists, itinerant teachers or "wise men" who gave instruction, especially vocational, for a fee.

Formal education flourished and waned in post-classical periods, yet examples of non-formal education repeatedly appear. The apprentice system, instruction by the clergy, the concentrated study and individual instruction of the yeshivas in middle European Jewish communities all represent transmission of knowledge from person to person outside the limitations and role expectations of a traditional classroom situation.

Examples of non-formal education are as evident today as they have been in the past. In some cases, non-formal approaches exist under the auspices of established educational programs, where they modify "traditional" methods to meet the needs of particular students or difficult situations. Efforts toward progressive, "open," or "informal" education -- especially the earliest -- were indeed non-formal, for they violated the narrow view of what school was all about. Recent efforts at "universities without walls" and "alternative" schools are also examples of non-formal education existing under the aegis of educational authority.

In some cases, a non-formal approach has been the only possible way to bring education to certain populations. Rural areas especially have been serviced by mobile educators who, like the Sophists, travel to the students and convey their knowledge, often basic skills, on the spot. The movement toward "lifelong learning" also falls under the rubric of non-formal education. Its concept -- obvious though it may be -- is that learning never ends and that schooling also need never finish. Older people, among the so-called "non-traditional students," with lives full of work and family experiences, are returning to school, bringing with them strengths and problems which often necessitate non-formal instruction. The eighty-five year old grandmother is no longer a rarity among the marchers as students graduate from college. She has been joined by many women and meen returning to school to improve or change their job skills, to

enchance their lives, and to change the image they project to themselves and to others (Cross, 1972; Hershburgh, et al., 1973; Straiger, 1978). It is interesting to hear the echo of the Roman playwright Seneca: "We must learn as long as we lack knowledge; and that means, as long as we live" (Cary, Nock, et al., 1949).

Techniques of non-formal education have been widely and successfully applied in many parts of the world. The entertainment media, especially radio, and on-the-spot demonstrations of job skills provide learning experiences in places where schools are nonexistent. Training in literacy skills, family living, child care, agriculture, etc., has been brought to people who are basically alienated from traditional instruction because of geographic isolation or lack of formal primary training. Community members who have received brief, intensive training or paraprofessionals frequently provide the instruction in inaccessible places. Mobile theatre companies are also common teaching devices in the Third World.(NFE Exchange, 1977, 1978).

The diversity of non-formal programs worldwide demonstrates one salient aspect of the approach: there is no list of guidelines for the implementation of non-formal education. Individual programs may generate recommended procedural steps, but these do not constitute "lesson plans" for non-formal teaching. Non-formal education remains responsive to the emotional and academic needs of students and to the environmental restraints of a given locality.

Non-formal education is characterized by the following points:

... It is responsive to the immediate needs of a specific population or situation.

... It may exist outside the formal education network or as an alternative approach to traditional methodologies within the school superstructure.

... Its goals often extend beyond transmission of skills to effecting changes in self-concept or political-social awareness of participants.

... Content is often skill-specific rather than global; it may be academic (e.g. literacy skills) or functional.

... The time frame may be limited, especially when instruction is brought to remote areas; mastery of the skill determines the end of instruction in the area.

... Environmental constraints such as school buildings, laboratory equipment, etc , do not limit education: tents, a field, a villager's hut, the back of a van can all become "schools".

... Paraprofessionals and community workers may constitute the entire teaching staff.

The reader is referred to Hanson and Brembeck (1966), Brembeck (1973), and Coombs (1974) for more detailed background on non-formal educational programs.

Reading and Non-formal Education

Beginning reading instruction both in and out of school settings has benefited from non-formal approaches. Illiteracy is a major world problem, which has drawn the attention of individual governments, the United Nations, the World Council of Churches, and others. Massive attempts by agencies such as UNESCO have experienced disappointing results in their attempts to bring reading and writing skills to people in Third World nations (Harman, 1974). Many of the programs geared to adults have been based on an elementary school model. Additionally, newly literate individuals have not been able to find appropriate materials to stimulate them to hone their new skills (Abhari, 1978). In many cases, the programs have concentrated on mechanical skills -- decoding and penmanship -- with no affective component to illustrate the purpose, utility, or joy of literacy (Freire, 1970a). Specific skills "learned" in such programs are quickly lost (Harman, 1974; Abhari, 1978). The isolated skills approach presupposes many intellectual and academic deficits and may in fact grossly underrate participants' abilities. In opposition to the deficit model, "research does not support designing adult literacy programs on the assumption that nonliterates do not think abstractly, do not reason logically, or lack other basic mental processes" (Scribner & Cole, 1978, 459).

More successful approaches to literacy instruction have followed a non-formal model (Kozol, 1973; Harman, 1974). Examination of two non-formal programs -- one for literacy training, the other for initial instruction in reading -- will demonstrate the techniques, attitudes, and characteristics of this approach.

One of the most successful literacy programs is that which was begun in Brazil by Paulo Freire. Freire began his work with illiterate peasants in northeastern Brazil and continued it in Chile. His affiliations with Harvard, with the Center for Intercultural Documentation at Cuernavaca, Mexico, and currently with the World Council of Churches in Geneva have extended his influence far beyond South America.

Freire's methodology sprang in part from his criticism of traditional education. The educational system, which he termed "paternalistic," contributed to the oppression experienced by the poor. The poor, Freire has stated, find critical awareness and response almost impossible because of the political social, and economic domination under which they live. Their situation has produced a "culture of silence," which in turn has helped to maintain their oppression. The poor are not aware that they have a "culture" in the same sense as the wealthy and think of themselves as things, tools, rather than as men and women. Illiteracy strengthens the oppression of the poor and can be eradicated only by educational experiences which help men and

women to deal creatively and critically with their realities and to participate actively in the transformation of their societies (Freire, 1970a; Grabowski, 1972; Ryan, 1974).*

Freire's approach to literacy instruction begins with listening and proceeds with dialogues.(Freire, 1973). The first step in his program is study of the context of the lives of the illiterate population which will receive instruction. Through this study comes an understanding of the life issues faced by the people. Step two is the production of a list of twenty or so words which will comprise a core vocabulary for initial instruction. These words, all of three or more syllables, must have the basic sounds of their language so that the students can manipulate the syllables to produce new words. The manipulation of syllables and recognition of new words foster confidence in the students and encourage further work.

The words chosen for the core vocabulary must additionally be fraught with social and political connotations to stimulate in the students mental and emotional interaction with the life issues which had been observed in the first step of the program. Agrarian populations learned and dissected words relating to farming; prisoners' vocabularies were specific to their incar-

* Extensive consideration of Freire's political and philosophical concerns is beyond the scope of this paper. It will deal, instead, primarily with his educational ideas.

ceration (Sanders, 1969). Chomsky's concept of deep and surface meanings is frequently cited as linguistic justification for the demand for rich, connotative vacabularies.

Freire felt that a vocabulary generated in this manner was preferable to that of the standard primers because it reflects the realities of the people who will read the words. Primers present words chosen by an expert, are not an expression of the learners' world, and actually stand between the students and the teacher to inhibit learning.(Sanders, 1968; Freire, 1973).

The next steps involve the development and utilization of materials: word cards and pictures of situations to be discussed. The word cards present complete words or the syllables to be manipulated into new words. Initially, in Brazil, the materials were introduced and used separately. In Chile, however, a more successful strategy was to introduce the two steps together and to combine instruction and discussion (Freire, 1973). The regularity of Portuguese and Spanish facilitates rapid mastery of phonemic "families" as consonant substitution is used along with structural analysis to expand the students' vocabularies. The "families" are placed on "Discovery Cards" which enable students to synthesize particles into new, readable words (Freire, 1973).* Composition practice occurs simultaneously.

* One common criticism of Freire's method is that it depends upon phonetic regularity. It is,however, being effectively used with African languages (Freire, 1978).

Pictures or "codifications" of situations related to the core vocabulary and to local issues are used to impress on the pupils an imagistic connection with the written symbols and to stimulate thinking and discussion of those issues. Guiding the process is a group facilitator who is not "in charge" in a paternalistic, overseeing fashion but who serves as a "coordinator of a discussion, while the pupils become participants in a group trying to understand existence in a changing society" (Sanders, 1968, 4). The teacher/facilitator poses questions to stimulate discussion and sympathetic dialogue. One picture used in Chile, for example, showed a peasant's house and introduces the word CASA. To accompany the picture and word would be provacative questions about housing in Chilean cities and towns and perhaps about the availability of loans for housing construction. By avoiding a "rote, mechanical process, [it is] possible for [the peasants] to achieve critical consciousness so that they can teach themselves to read and write" (Freire, 1973, 56).

In their manipulation of syllables to create new words and in their political discussions, the students experience the strength and power of literacy and of thinking skills. They discover their humanity, their existence as men rather than as agricultural or industrial tools. They combine thought and action and discover the existence of their own cultures, distinct from and not inferior to that of the middle and upper classes. Freire felt that literacy gives men a voice and

changes their consciousness of themselves within their societies as they realize "they have the right to have a voice" (Freire, 1970a, 213).

Freire's concept of education for the lower classes and his open criticism of Brazilian education led to his imprisonment and expulsion from Brazil. He worked in adult literacy and agrarian reform in Chile for five years before leaving Latin America for a professorship at Harvard. His current work with the World Council of Churches has involved him with literacy training in Africa.

A second example of non-formal instruction of beginning reading skills is the work of Sylvia Ashton-Warner. In her work with Maori children, Ashton-Warner (1963) synthesized pedogogical ideas, observations, and sensitivity into an "organic approach" to beginning reading and writing. Her pupils were five, six, and seven year old Maoris, who upon leaving her "infant room" would have to make a transition from the security of their own traditions and culture to the more rigid requirements and expectations of a European model of education. This passage had proven difficult for many Maori children. Ashton-Warner knew that possession of solid basic literacy skills could ease the transition for her children. Her method of instruction -- in addition to the flexible, loving, and joyful environment of the classroom she described -- facilitated early and competent mastery of the basic skills of reading, writing,

and spelling. Ashton-Warner has lectured and consulted extensively and has strongly influenced many educators to espouse or at least adapt her organic method (Ashton-Warner, 1972)

Ashton-Warner rejected the standard primers for use with her children because they presented middle class, urban vocabularies, were two-dimensional, and were too respectable and peaceful for use with children who experienced much violence in their lives (Ashton-Warner, 1963). In her method of organic instruction, the vocabulary words come directly from the children. Words chosen by the students and the eventual sentences and stories they composed were, to Ashton-Warner (1963, 38), what initial reading materials should be -- "children's drawing . . . the picture of /their/ inner vision and the captions chosen by the children themselves that had the power and the light". She observed that in her infant room the key vocabulary words usually centered around fear and sex but that actual entries per se varied from locality to locality across New Zealand. She contended that slower readers too had private vocabularies and that a teacher who can discover that store can launch those children into reading. Word length had no relationship to power content and hence to children's tendency to remember words after presentation. Ashton-Warner's conviction in these maxims was somewhat shaken by her experiences in a Colorado "open" school in the early 1970's but her belief in the power of her method remained strong (Ashton-Warner, 1973).

The organic method of instruction proceeds through several stages. The first step is the collection of a bank of those words which each child in a class wants to learn. In her infant rooms, Ashton-Warner spent the first part of each morning individually soliciting words from each student, writing them in block print on cards, and sending the children off to practice tracing, saying, and "reading" the words. These word cards are the first reading material for each child, and they are stored for future referral and drill. Children drill their words with each other and with the teacher. Those not remembered during drill are discarded as "invalid". The words solicited must, Ashton-Warner contended, have intense personal meaning for the children: their power to motivate lies in their not being neutral words selected by a publisher. The words in general reflected the children's homelife, fears, desires, dreams. In an organic approach to reading instruction, ample time must be given over to the children's sharing their words and ideas with each other. Ashton-Warner wrote (1963, 45), "I don't teach at all. . . The teaching is done among themselves, mixed up with all the natural concomitants of relationships".

After a child has accumulated a solid store of about forty words, the second stage of instruction begins. In this sequence, the children engage in creative writing -- first sentences, then stories using their private and meaningful vocabularies to

express their "inner world". Actual instruction occurs as spelling, penmanship, and grammar are corrected. Words solicited during this stage are recorded in a notebook for future use. This writing comes from the children's thoughts, uses their words, and is self-motivating. Again, Ashton-Warner wrote (1963, 49), "But I don't call it teaching: I call it creativity since it all comes from them and nothing from me, and because spelling and composition are no longer separate subjects to be taught but emerge naturally as another medium".

Step three in the organic method involves spelling instruction and lengthier reading and writing practice. The children use the amassed store of words and new words which they request to write longer and longer stories. The daily new words are put on the blackboard for spelling practice. For about ten minutes, the children silently study their own words. After that, each child is asked to spell one or more words-- of his own choice -- for the teacher and fellow students. Children thereby reinforce their own words and learn others' words by attending to the oral practice. Following the spelling drill, children meet together with the teacher to read their own stories and to share them with each other. As fellow students read one anothers' stories, they seek help with difficult words not from the teacher but from the author himself. Teaching and vocabulary drill occur simultaneously and spontaneously. As children read their own stories aloud, discussion arises; and as a major tenet of the approach, this interchange is encouraged and valued.

This method allows for many facets of 'individualization. Because the vocabulary and stories are of the children's own creation, individual expression is fostered. The teacher's interaction with the children is usually on a one-to-one basis. Further, the children are truly at their own instructional level as they create their own material. The frustration of material that is too hard or too easy is avoided, and the subject matter is intrinsically motivating.

The final step in Ashton-Warner's organic method in New Zealand was the creation and presentation of "transitional readers." Drawing entirely from her students' stories, she wrote and illustrated four readers specifically designed for the Maori children. She strove to get the "temperament" of their village life into the books by including drama, communal sympathy, and violence. Her purpose was simply to provide an instructional transition from the individualized organic method to the European system which the children would experience when they left her class. Strong academic skills would soften the jolt of this transition, and, she wrote (1963, 63), "A five, meeting words for the first time and finding they have intense meaning for him, at once loves reading". The strongly personal transitional readers would bolster skills and encourage love of reading as well as providing an introduction to the "hardware" of traditional educational methods.

Ashton-Warner (1963, 1973) has insisted that the creation of some kind of personal, meaningful reader is a key step in organic instruction. It provides a bridge from non-formal to traditional instruction.

As educators concerned with reading and writing skills, both Ashton-Warner and Freire held literacy as something more than understanding and manipulation of graphic symbols. Reading and writing can provide young children and adults alikewith a liberation from previous and possibly on-going existences, with an expansion of selves. Both believed that this liberation extended beyond intellectual growth to encompass cultural and personal outreach. Of reading, Ashton-Warner wrote (1963, 26), "It's the bridge from the known to the unknown, from a native culture to a new; and universally speaking, from the inner man out".

Traditional materials and teaching methods suited neither's purpose. For Freire, they symbolized a continuation of the oppression under which the peasants had lived for so long, a further means of separating them from themselves as thinking beings, as men. Both felt that initial reading instruction should be accomplished with materials springing from the life stuff of the students themselves. Freire's words (1970a, 37) echoed many of Ashton-Warner's criticisms: "Our traditional curriculum, disconnected from life, centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity, could never develop a critical consciousness". That critical consciousness would be necessary for each population of students to accomplish the tasks which their teachers felt lay ahead and could be gained through non-formal means.

The teacher in the learning experiences conceived by Freire and Ashton-Warner is not a mere dispenser of knowledge or skills. Instead, the teacher engages heartily in a dialogue with the

learners, helping, coordinating, providing needed information, and structuring the situation so that optimal, meaningful learning can be achieved.

Rejection of traditional materials and redefining of the teacher role are indicative of many non-formal instructional programs. Traditional methods, often conceived in a vacuum and practiced to perfection, are not always the most effective ways to convey information to students. Further, some situations cannot be met with traditional methods: materials or personnel are lacking or geographic constraints make formal methodology inapplicable. Non-formal education offers options.

The options provided by non-formal instruction are responsive to the needs, concerns, and interests of the students. Inherent in the approach is the flexibility which allowed Freire (1973; Sanders, 1968) to change his method in Chile when he realized that the Chilean students shunned the discussion that the Brazilians had craved. Freire collapsed stages of his methodology into each other to combine discussion and instruction.

The emotional as well as academic needs of students are frequently given equal consideration in non-formal programs. Freire (1970 , 55) sought "a humanizing pedagogy in which the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed". Ashton-Warner (1963, 1973), less eloquently, recommended constant conversation between children and between teacher and students.

A cornerstone of both approaches to literacy training is the authenticity which Freire and Ashton-Warner required of the

materials they utilized. These materials, derived from their students' lives, reflected reality and provided a consuming motivational force. Non-formal instruction frequently relies on real desire to participate in the learning process rather than on external motivation. Equally, the learning situation may stimulate motivation for continuance which would be lacking in a more traditional program.

Conclusion

To review the programs of Freire or Ashton-Warner, to survey the remarkable results of Cuba's literacy campaign (Kozol, 1978), or to read of Laubach's highly successful efforts to bring literacy to primitive peoples (Laubach, 1960; Medary, 1954), one cannot question that "non-formal" approaches were appropriate and indeed responsible for results. Current literature (Harman, 1974) recommends similar techniques for adult literacy instruction and stresses the importance of an affective, social component in the instruction.

The language experience approach to initial reading instruction (Hall, 1972, 1978; Stauffer, 1969) has been recognized as an alternative to the basal programs used in 95% of our elementary schools. Because its effectiveness has never been statistically proven (Hall, 1978; Harris & Morrison, 1969), it is usually viewed as a supplementary program and is rarely administered with the energy and commitment that Ashton-Warner would demand. Language experience is frequently criticized as too time-consuming, although Ashton-Warner (1963, 45) found her method "the easiest way I have ever begun reading".

Reading instruction and the acquisition of reading skills have generated extensive research; and the observed failures of many traditional methods, coupled with the high rate of illiteracy worldwide, have generated much fear. Non-formal methods of instruction have been shown to be successful in a wide range of localities and with diverse populations. Undoubtedly, though, "non-formal" to many smacks of risk, experimentation, or at least budgetary excesses. The documented successes of non-formal approaches to reading and writing instruction do not allay the fears of many educators and lay persons who try to rework traditional methodologies rather than adopt or devise alternatives. The seriousness of the numbers of illiterates and semiliterates should motivate interest in those non-formal approaches which have been successful. Methods such as Freire's and Ashton-Warner's are especially desirable because of their strong humanizing components: both programs combine skills instruction with emotional growth. Inappropriate reading instruction has perhaps been responsible for more academic failure and accompanying lack of self-esteem than instruction in any other area.

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